

ANONYMOUS SJ

South Jersey Intergroup

March 2012

Service with a Smile

At the beginning of the A.A. Service Manual, Bill W. talks about A.A.'s Legacy of Service: "Our Twelfth Step—carrying the message—is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, to the A.A.'s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service." (Bill wrote these words in 1951 so his words reflect that time period in their details.)

Below, a member reflects on how service has helped keep him sober for 27 years.

John K of Collingswood says he's done pretty much everything you can do in service within A.A. He's been greeter, coffee maker, secretary, treasurer, meeting chair, General Service Representative, District Committee Member, Area 45 Delegate and a Trustee of A.A. World Services. Did he ever feel that one of those jobs was more important than the other?

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The Third Step

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

Meat & Potatoes

When I came into A.A., I had no willingness, no Higher Power and no clue what I was going to do. I wanted to die!

When I walked into my first meeting, I finally felt that I had found something that fit me. I was welcomed into the rooms – clueless, scared, lonely and miserable. The people in the rooms told me that I never had to feel that way again and to "keep coming back"!

The last ten years of my drinking, maybe longer, people would see me and stay clear of me in fear of the insanity that was to come when I crossed that line. Daily, now that I look at my track record (drink – get drunk – blackout – cause problems and chaos – then pass out!) I don't think if I had let a Higher Power into my life he would have wanted me to act or live like that.

Step 1 and Step 2 were relatively easy for me. I knew I was powerless and insane and it didn't take much thought to figure out that I was a horrible manager of my life.

Then Step 3 appeared. How could I make such a decision to a God that I didn't think that I had in the first place. People in the rooms made that easy for me. They said that I could use their God until I got one of my own. So that is what I did. Without a doubt, God spoke to me through you good people in A.A.

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“No, I just make myself available and the good lord will point me in the direction he wants me to go. They can’t elect me to dog-catcher, though.”

John is modest—his home office is filled with mementos from his years of service, including a framed resolution from the A.A. World Services Board dated April 22, 2010. It thanks him for his service as Trustee, Director and Chair of the 35th Area 45 Convention.

Read page 20 of the Big Book, he told me. It says, in part, “Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs.”

He remembers the day he stopped drinking—it was St. Patrick’s Day 27 years ago this month. He didn’t plan it that way—his family staged an intervention, and he attended his first A.A. meeting in April of 1985. He did not drink in the interim.

“I know A.A. works because an Irishman got sober on St. Patrick’s Day.”

With all of that time how does he stop himself from becoming a “Bleeding Deacon”, something Bill W. writes about and the type of A.A. we all may all have met a few times in the rooms?

“The book that I read says if you’re having trouble, go find a drunk. It doesn’t say go find a guy with time.”

John isn’t sure how many people he’s sponsored over the years (“maybe 50” is his best guess), but he is currently a recovery sponsor to 3 people, and a service sponsor to 4 others. I asked him for some advice on how to stay sober, and this is what he told me:

“We don’t have any control over anything at all and we never will. If we had control, we would not ever get sick. One of the sicknesses that we have is alcoholism and the only way to treat it that I know of is through A.A. And the way they treat it is that they give us manageability. We don’t get control, but we get the tools. And if we use the tools we’ll never drink.

The Course in Miracles says the only aspect of eternity which we’ll ever experience in this life is now, and if I don’t drink now I’ll never drink. A day

at a time is a huge amount of time. But this moment is not. It is manageable. Manage this instant.”

So what would he tell a newcomer about service? “Don’t drink, go to meetings and get a job.” HIS sponsor volunteered him as greeter when he had about three months, and taught him to always say yes when someone asked for help. He points out that that is a more positive way of saying “never say no”.

He points me to another passage from the Big Book, on page 102: “Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed.”

He urges everyone, especially newcomers, to attend the Area 45 convention being held in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, this month. He says it’s a “huge benefit” to people who are struggling to see the success of so many others—it’s anticipated that there will be about 1500 people at the convention this year. Will he be there?

Of course, he says. “It keeps me out of the saloons.”

Patty H., Newsletter Chair

"Meat & Potatoes" continued from page 1

Slowly I found my own God, of my own understanding, and without any reservation. I now make this awesome, lifesaving decision “one day at a time”. To me this is the meat and potatoes of the spiritual path that I am on. A.A. saved my life. I found my God in A.A. and for that I am forever grateful.

Step 3 helps me to be of service to others. People were there for me when I first came into the rooms and I received this precious gift. Now it is up to me to give this gift to others – unconditionally. My God is there for others to use if anyone needs Him. These gifts are received on a daily basis. All I have to be is willing. Reading spiritual literature has really helped me with Step 3. Newcomers keep coming back! A.A. is without a doubt the best thing that has ever happened to me!

Jim - The Willingboro Group

The Third Tradition

"The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking."

A member expresses his opinion about "rules" in AA, while holding fast to the Third Tradition.

Of late I've been noticing there are, so to speak, not just one but two distinct AAs—two movements, each claiming to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Recently the group that's been my AA home for more than a decade began requiring some people not to wear certain clothing (shoes, let's say) during our weekly meetings. The group's reason for its dress code is to show respect for AA and the meeting. To be fair, the group didn't call its new rule a dress code—I do. "Dress code" is my name for any rule that says what must or mustn't be worn in a given situation.

AA tradition provides group autonomy, leaving such an issue up to the group—not me—to decide. So for now I accept my home group's rule, setting aside my disagreement with it. Of course I'm free to keep trying to convince other group members that the rule should be dropped. Or I can look for a new home group, if the issue is really that important to me. For today, it isn't that important. But the dress code has led me to consider the two AAs.

One is an AA that seeks to protect Alcoholics Anonymous from misguided actions of individual alcoholics, by instructing them and regulating their behavior. Thus a group adopts a dress code, directing individuals to show respect by their attire. Some practice "blue cardism," requiring members to confine sharing to certain kinds of experiences only, leaving out some other experiences lest AA be "diluted" by somebody sharing honestly about the wrong stuff. This is an AA in which newcomers—for their own good, of course—are apt to hear lectures specifying actions old-timers have determined new members absolutely must take or they will surely drink again. It's an AA where an individual may be abruptly and loudly called to account should she or he fail to self-identify in an acceptable manner.

It is an AA in which people with less continuous sober time than deemed sufficient may be declared ineligible for service positions. And so on. In their variety, what such prescriptions have in common is a behavior-control conception of what AA is.

The other AA is an Alcoholics Anonymous of acceptance, honesty, humility and tolerance, where leaders serve, not govern. It's an AA where I have the right and the obligation to try to honestly share my own experience and to stay within the bounds of that experience. I believe I owe it to my AA to try very hard to curb my impulse to elevate myself from my pupil's role to that of a teacher, to resist that imperious urge to pronounce my opinions and prescriptions so others will know what they need to do. No, my job is simply to reveal, as honestly as I have the capacity to do on this day, what I did and what happened to me when I did it.

Mine is an AA having little, if any, need to be protected from or by anything or anyone. It is an AA without rules. It's an AA where my respect for another person or group is mine alone to develop, mine alone to display (or to decline to display) in whatever way I see fit.

The only requirement to belong to my AA is a desire not to drink. In my AA everything—including anything in any of the Twelve Steps—is but suggested. So it's an AA in which every single person is free to take what she or he chooses and leave the rest. It is an AA in which more will be revealed; and one in which, in the meantime, I, and my home group, have the inalienable right to be wrong.

Reminder!

South Jersey Intergroup's monthly meetings are being held at a new location:

St. Bartholmew's Episcopal Church (St. Bart's)
1989 Route 70 East
Cherry Hill, NJ

We meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 8pm. Come and see how A.A. functions at the Intergroup level!

The SJIG Unity Committee Needs YOU

"The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or A.A. dies. Without unity, the heart of A.A. would cease to beat."

--excerpt from Tradition One (page 129) in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

If you're looking for a service commitment within your home group, Kathy Jo S. has just what you need. She is the new chair of the South Jersey Intergroup Unity Committee, and she says they are in need of volunteers.

"A.A. doesn't work unless we're connected, and the Unity Committee members carry the message to their individual groups. We are much more effective when we can work together as a whole."

You've probably seen Kathy Jo at the monthly Intergroup meetings—she sits at a large table in the back of the meeting, busily registering new committee members and handing out information packets. She has made it her mission to recruit new volunteers, and she's had some success with her outreach. At the last Unity Committee meeting, she counted 35 members—but she won't stop until each group in the South Jersey Intergroup area has a member on the committee.

A Unity Committee representative spreads the A.A. message in a few very important ways. First of all, they explain how South Jersey Intergroup works and describe service opportunities at the Intergroup level. They are also responsible for organizing alcathons within the five counties that make up SJIG—Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties.

The first alcathon organized under Kathy Jo's tenure is the spring alcathon, which is set for Sunday, April 8th from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in Camden County. It'll be held behind Queen of Heaven Church, which is near Route 70 and Connecticut Avenue in Cherry Hill. For more information and to volunteer, please contact Kathy Jo at 609-790-3740, or write to her at unity@asj.org.

"We are attempting to put at least one alcathon in all five counties this year, but we need help from the groups for possible locations for these alcathons," she told me. If you would like to help organize an alcathon in your county, you know who to call!

Finally, Kathy Jo says another benefit of serving on the Unity Committee is making new friends. "That's what recovery is all about, developing new relationships."

She's a very busy woman but also a very happy one. "It's not about me anymore. It's about giving back."

Patty H. - Newsletter Chair

2012 Alcathon Schedule

Spring Alcathon: Sunday, April 8, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Location: Queen of Heaven Church (behind church)

700 west Marlon pike - (across from fire house)
Rt. 70 and Connecticut Ave., Cherry Hill, NJ
08034

Memorial Day: Monday, May 28, location to be announced

Fourth of July: Wednesday, July 4, location to be announced

Labor Day: Monday, September 3, location to be announced

Thanksgiving Day: Thursday, November 22, location to be announced

Christmas: starting Monday, December 24, location to be announced

New Year: starting Monday, December 31, location to be announced

If you'd like to help plan one of the above or are interested in serving on the Unity Committee, here is the contact information:

Email: Unity@asj.org

Kathy Jo-unity chair, 609-790-3740

Billy A.-co-chair, 703-980-6515

Keeping It Green

This story appeared in the March 2012 online edition of the Grapevine

To admit to being an alcoholic has taken an exceeding amount of trial and error. I started drinking like an alcoholic when I was 14 years old. I am now 54 and have been sober for only 25 days. I've quit drinking a myriad of times, but would relapse all over again. When will I quit for good? I don't really know—maybe not until I'm dead. But I have more hope this time. Here is the story of my last bottom.

I once stayed sober for 9 months because I was locked up: first in county jail and then in a men's corrections facility. There, I was able to go to a treatment program. When I was released, I had in the back of my mind that my legal and drinking problems were the result of bad luck, not alcoholism.

Having saved up a lot of money from a pension, I rented a cheap motel room where I began drinking. That bender lasted over three months. A great deal of bad things happened to me during that period. This is what my life looked like then: I lost my appetite right away. I isolated most of the time, preferring to drink alone. I started forgetting a lot, I'd rather drink and forget than stay sober and think about myself. I obsessed over television shows which was easier than doing something more meaningful with my life.

I went for weeks without showering or bathing. I would pass out for hours at a time. After waking up, I would get earthquaking shakes along with tremendous anxiety, and thoughts about dying. I would often throw up, but then start drinking again right away. My ankles started swelling up, but I'd drink and ignore them. Toward the end, I felt generally sick most of the time. I began losing control of my bowels and bladder. I was a mess.

My relationship with my girlfriend and extended family was minimal. When I was drinking, I really didn't care much about important things. Then during very brief periods of being sober—or almost sober—I would feel overwhelming remorse and worthlessness, then drink more to kill the pain.

At any rate, sometime during this last drunk, I became "sick and tired of being sick and tired." I'd hit bottom like I'd never hit it before. And I kept remembering how good I'd felt the 9 months I was pressured by the court to stay sober, I desperately wanted that feeling back. Subsequently, I tried several times to stop drinking, only to fail because I would get those intense shakes again—it was drink or die I thought. Then I got so afraid of dying I checked myself into detox. My desire to stop drinking then began to grow and grow. After detox I began going to A.A. every day, connecting with God, my sponsor, my fellow recovering alcoholics. I was staying sober and sane. What a difference!

Now, still having a great deal of desire to stop drinking, my mind is opening up to all kinds of helpful ways to stay sober. I listen at AA meetings like never before, applying a lot of the suggestions I hear. I study the "Big Book" and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions every morning, after which I pray and meditate. This gets my day off to a good start. I take the advice of my doctors and counselors very seriously. I stay busy throughout the day with various sobering routines: socializing with other sober people, spending afternoons at the library, working on writing projects, and so on. It seems the good stuff in my life could go on forever, and I humbly believe my Higher Power, whom I call God, is behind it all.

May whatever experience, strength and hope I have be passed on to others. I am now 30 days into sobriety.

John L.



Fellowship Announcements & Things to Do

March 23 - 25 - 48th Annual Southern New Jersey Area 45 General Service Convention. Crowne Plaza Hotel, 2349 Marlton Pike (Rt. 70), Cherry Hill, NJ. \$35.00/pp. Register by mail or online at www.snjaaconvention.org . Preregistrations must be received by March 9.

Thursday, March 29 - Voorhees Women of Grace (formerly Cherry Hill Women's 12+12) is celebrating their 20th Anniversary at the Hope United Methodist Church, Cooper Rd and Centennial Blvd., Voorhees NJ from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM.. Food and Refreshments at 6:00 PM; Speakers at 7:00 PM. (Women Only, Please)

Saturday, March 31 - Vineland Noons Group 20th Anniversary. Trinity Episcopal Church, 800 Wood St (8th & Wood Sts.), Vineland, NJ. 2 Speakers NOON / Eating 1:00 PM

Friday, April 6 - Social Moonlight Hike & Campfire at Goshen Pond sponsored by SJIG Social Committee. 6 mile moderate pace. Bring picnic type food to share after hike & chair. Meet at Goshen Pond off Atsion Rd., Vincetown, NJ. Leader: Paul S - 609.462.3593, pis1@cccnj.net Contact: Sherrill B - 856.889.5595.

Spring Alcahthon: Sunday, April 8, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. Location: Queen of Heaven Church (behind church) 700 west Marlon pike - (across from fire house) Rt. 70 and Connecticut Ave., Cherry Hill, NJ 08034

Saturday, April 14 - Mini-Conference - Registration begins at 8:30 AM. Mini-Conference from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM. St. Charles Borromeo Church, 176 Stagecoach Rd., Sicklerville, NJ, 08081. All are welcome. Come out and help our Delegate to carry your informed group conscience to New York.

May 11 - 13 - 35th Annual Couples in Recovery Escape Weekend. St. Mary of Providence Center, 227 Isabella Rd., Elverson, PA 19520. \$260.00/couple includes room & 5 meals. www.stmaryofprov-pa.org For more info call Wayne: 856-845-8279.

Sunday, May 13 - Oaklyn Step By Step Group 21st Anniversary. 6:00 PM - Food 8:00 PM - 2 Great Speakers: Sonny & Clyde. St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 1 E. Haddon Ave. at WHP.

Sunday, May 20 - Area 45 Spring Assembly - Registration, 8:30 am; New GSR/DCM Orientation, 9:00 am; Assembly, 10:00 am; Lunch, 12:30 pm; Workshop, 12:45 pm; Committee Meeting, 1:30 pm - approx 3:00 pm. Elmer Grange Hall, 164 Woodstown-Daretown Rd., Pilesgrove, NJ, 08098. All are welcome.

June 1- 3 - Matt Talbot Retreat. Serenity Weekend for Recovering Alcoholic Men. Marianist Family Retreat Center, 417 Yale Ave., Cape May Point, NJ. <http://www.capemaymarianists.org/> Cost: \$150.00. Contact: Joe 609-313-2999 or Jim 856-842-3060

Saturday, June 16 - Founder's Day Picnic. Subaru Pavilion, Park Ave at Cooper River Park. 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM. Free. Speaker at 2:00 PM.

June 29, 30 - July 1 - 1st Annual Liberty Bell Roundup. The Woodstock of AA. Ramada Philadelphia Airport, 76 Industrial Hwy., Essington, PA 19029. \$35.00 Registration. Liberty Bell Roundup

Saturday, July 14 - Fishing Trip aboard the Duke O' Fluke sponsored by SJIG Social Committee. 1:00 - 5:00 PM. \$25.00 p/p includes rod, tackle, bait, and mate's tip. Higbee Ave. at the bay, Somers Point, NJ. Contact - Mike Lore: 856- 779-1830. mikelore@voicenet.com . Directions: www.dukeofluke.com

Editorial Policy

Anonymous SJ is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey Intergroup (although we welcome readers from other areas!). Opinions expressed herein are NOT to be attributed to A.A. as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either A.A. or South Jersey Intergroup. Quotations and artwork from A.A. literature are printed with permission from A. A. World Services, Inc., and/or The A. A. Grapevine, Inc.

Contributions from readers are encouraged—you can write about your experience, strength and hope in general, or you can focus on one of the steps or traditions. You can also write about something that touched you at a meeting, something that bothered you at a meeting, or some service commitment you especially enjoy. Submissions are edited for space and clarity ONLY. Contact information is required and anonymity is respected.

One other note—due to space limitations, we are unable to publish flyers for events in this newsletter. However, we are happy to include your gathering in the general list of fellowship announcements. Send your submissions to: newsletter@asj.org